



Never Quit

The following story is from the book *Never Quit* by Glenn Cunningham. This book is an autobiography. It was published in 1981 when Cunningham was 72 years old.

The 1936 Berlin Olympics

There was some confusion at the start as runners jostled one another for position. But I was used to this, and I lay back, moving to the outer edge of the pack, running easily and waiting for an opening.

The crowd was noisy. I knew they wouldn't be yelling like that for long. In less than four minutes they would be applauding the winners and forgetting the losers.

But I was not going to lose. At 27, this could be my last chance to prove myself.

The noise of the crowd throbbed in my ears, modulated by the pounding of my heart. I was pouring on the power when suddenly my legs began to hurt.

Panic. Again the pain, the aching. Would it never go away?...

At the halfway point in the race a swift Frenchman took the lead. I decided to overtake him. I was about to pass the man when my right leg suddenly buckled! I nearly fell.

I recovered at once. But now new pains stabbed through my legs.

Once more I started after the Frenchman. This time I passed him, and the crowd went wild. I had the lead!...

We were in the stretch now. I lengthened my stride, fighting the pain. I pumped my arms harder.

But I was in trouble. Big trouble. My legs could give out completely in an instant.

I could see the finish line. I could also see the runner who was inching up on my right side.

That fellow was passing me. The crowd went into a frenzy as I managed to pull away from him.

But my legs were on fire. The realization enraged me. It seemed so unfair. The anger gave me new strength as I pounded the cinders toward the finish.

And then, too late, I saw that I wasn't going to make it. In the final lap Jack Lovelock came out of nowhere. From the corner of my right eye I saw him launch into a mighty last effort.

Jack crossed the line first. I finished second.

At the judges' stand I was presented the silver second-place award – my first and only Olympic medal.

Later, as the reporters descended upon us, I made no mention of the leg pains. When a well-known sportswriter pressed me for a statement I told him truthfully, "I feel I ran a fast race. I broke the Olympic record for the mile. Only one person in the world ran faster."



Glenn Cunningham and another Kansas runner, Archie San Romani, were running in an amateur race in 1937. The racers ran for the New York Cotton Club and the New York Curb. These were companies that sponsored athletes. San Romani was winning until the very end. He tripped on the edge of the track and his foot hit Cunningham's leg. But, Cunningham raced ahead to win and San Romani came in fourth. This photograph was taken just before San Romani lost his balance.